1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[ARCHERS]

All activities outside the camp cease at night, with the exception of termite hunting which is conducted at whatever time of the day or night termites are found to be swarming. 512 222

Conception and Childbirth

The normal course of daily life runs uninterrupted throughout the year, except when camp is moved, or on ceremonial occasions attendant on birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Of these occasions, it seems from Schebesta's account that birth arouses the least public interest. The band welcomes each birth gladly but at the same time accepts it as no more than its due. The wives of its menfolk are expected to produce children; it is their primary function in the eyes of both the band and their husbands, and even in their own eyes. 844 (512) 844 621 [562]

The Pygmies seem to believe that menstrual blood is an important factor in conception (Schebesta, 1948, 399) and are well aware of the connection between coition and conception (1948, 400). Schebesta reports frequently hearing the opinion expressed that repeated coition would hasten the hour of birth. 842 833 [841].

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1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
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[ARCHERS]

Various rites and magical instruments are logically consistent with this notion: the *segbe* pipes that are able to deflect the storm, attract game, or defeat the enemy; the magic horn of the *maigwa* antelope that seeks out thieves; and the various charms and amulets used by hunters either on their bodies or on their weapons. Certain animals are reputed to possess an abundance of *megbe*, notably crows, crabs, the snake (*mageda*), the antelope (*maigwa*), the chameleon, the toad, and the tortoise.

According to various legends, menstrual blood is also possessed of magical force.

Opposed to *megbe* is *uda*, the force of black magic. As mentioned above, the archer accepts death as inevitable, the recalling by God of *ɔoru e'i*, the life principle Schebesta translates as "soul." But death may be caused by sorcerers through the use of *uda*. *Uda* is associated with menstrual blood, and Schebesta compares this notion with the legends that explain one cause of death as being the curiosity or greed of woman. This second cause of death, through *uda*, is thus attributed to the "original sin" of woman, who from curiosity or greed violated God's laws or lured man to do so.

Costermans (1938) and Boelaert (1936a) both criticize Schebesta on this point, saying that the material does not justify his conclu-

[P. 192-D]

1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
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[P.193-C] [ARCHERS]

The celestial God is an old man, with a beard which brings wind and storm to the earth world when it shakes. The Mbuti respect him, but offer no cult to him; he is too far removed and plays no direct part in the life of the earth world. He is linked to it, however, and plays his part in the Pygmy rationale as the ultimate source of all vital force which creates and gives life. It flows from the sky God into human beings, but his superabundance of the life force insures his permanent overlordship. The Mbuti regard him as the source of all creation and the support of the universe, without seeking to understand how he creates and preserves, or why he destroys by reclaiming the vital force he dispenses.

Schebesta states that the Mbuti place this sky God in the moon and thus even *deus otiosus* is involved in dualism, for the moon by its brightness is associated with fire, and by its periodicity with menstrual blood—the two symbols of life and death. (Both fire and menstrual blood have the dual association.)

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1956) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

838 married men sleeping together. The two age groups do not mix, but
513 among themselves members of the same sex think nothing of sleeping close to each other and deriving mild sexual satisfaction from the physical contact. They state very carefully rules as to how to lie, with legs thrown backwards around the other's legs, or even around his hips or waist, and they say one may entwine legs while lying front to front, though it is not considered good to hold each other too closely with the arms. The thought of any sexual intercourse taking place, [834] however, is greeted with apparent horror, and homosexuality is never alluded to except as a great insult, under the most dire provocation. There is, however, a dance in which the sexes are effectively reversed, and which is danced with the utmost humor, but the role of which [835] I could never exactly determine. The dance, *ekokomea*, is dealt with later in the context in which it occurs; namely, at the time of the *molimo* festival.

837 If a considerable amount of sexual liberty is allowed the youths, a
834 fair amount is at least said to be taken by the younger married hunters. I have not, however, been able to record a single instance of a marital dispute involving the band that arose out of infidelity on either side. There are few restrictions on sexual intercourse, though the villagers state many on behalf of the Mbuti. The married hunters, as do the youths, regard the hunt as an opportune time for ac- 841 tivity of this kind. At menstruation, which is a time when a village [842] woman is under the strictest ritual prohibitions, the Mbuti attitude is that it all depends on whether or not you want children, as this is when conception is most likely to take place. There are those who enjoy sex at this time, and those who find it distasteful. The only restriction is that a wife should inform her husband, or a girl her boy friend, that she is "with blood" so that he will know.

846 Immediately following childbirth is a rather vague period, some-
837 times stated as days, sometimes more grandiosely as years, when intercourse is forbidden. Unfortunately I was able to follow up only on three instances of childbirth, but in each of these the Mbuti fathers did exactly what they said they would do; two of them refrained from intercourse with their wives for about a year, during which time they flirted with as many girls as they liked, and did not deny open gossip 846 that they were "sleeping around." This is the generally accepted pat-
853 tern, the reason being given that a woman can only feed one child at a time, so she must not become pregnant again until her last child is weaned. This may be from one to three years. If during that time

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
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rounded by a vine that is carefully staked into the ground by V-shaped twigs. Within the circle long twigs, clean of bark, sometimes simply burned to create a pattern, are stuck into the ground pointing in the direction the hunt is to take place. Any animal caught is brought back and placed within the circle before being divided.

There is undoubtedly village influence to be found in some of the more elaborate magical practices. The Mbuti themselves consider *anjo* as village magic, also the magic sticks within the hunting-fire circle. The fire, however, is used everywhere, and regardless of any other accompanying ritual, there is no ritual attitude toward it other than the belief that it will secure the attention, hence the blessing, of the protective forest.

One clear example of village influence is that in any village context the Mbuti are likely to state sexual taboos connected with the hunt. These vary according to the village tribal custom, and may involve prohibition of sexual intercourse before the hunt, either as a permanent rule (which would be inconvenient for people who hunt almost daily) or for special occasions or classes of people. A menstruating woman and her husband are forbidden to take part in the hunt, according to some village customs. A pregnant woman may be under restrictions, as may be her husband, and childbirth involves further restrictions among many village tribes. To all such customary practices the Mbuti gladly pay lip service. In the forest, however, forest values prevail, and I have come across no sexual taboos associated directly with the hunt. Indeed, the hunt is considered by many, married and unmarried, as an excellent and exciting time to slip away into the bush and copulate. But sexual activity is above everything else a matter of personal taste. If a pregnant woman stays in camp, it is more likely because she feels unwell. If a father stays behind with his wife and her newborn child, it is probably because he wishes to be with them, though there are sometimes stated prohibitions on hunting or eating meat until the family net traps a large antelope. This will be made the occasion for lifting the taboo and for naming the child.

However, it is impossible to discover any consistent pattern of actual behavior, the only consistency appearing in stated behavior, and this relates directly to local village custom, which is based on the belief that the forest is ritually dangerous, unclean. Any villager in a position of crisis, such as becoming pregnant, being born, suffering from sickness or even injury, during menstruation or while near

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1959) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

(*ndura nde bokbu*), and if pressed begin to enumerate the totality of their experience. Primarily, however, they refer to the forest as mother or father, according to context. On the hunt the men address it as father, the women as mother. A man receiving a sudden unexpected favor, as he sees it (coming across a cache of highly prized mushrooms), is apt to address the forest as mother. A woman who is having a hard time finding the leaves or saplings she wants will, getting into a tangle of undergrowth, almost certainly start addressing the forest as father and accuse it of being far too severe and strict. The terms are so widely and frequently used that I have no means of saying which is the more prevalent. If anything, I would hazard a guess that "mother" is used more often than "father." The Mbuti themselves say that which term they use and when is a matter for their *roho*.

The extent to which the Mbuti personify the forest is seen when in explanation they say that the forest gives them not only food and shelter, warmth and clothing, but also affection (*ndura pisasu bendu, pisasu isa, pisasu ngombe; ndura ekondisu*). The intimacy of the relationship between the individual Mbuti and his forest godhead is most plainly seen in the incident described more fully in *The Forest People* (Chapter 15), where a youth was found dancing all by himself in the moonlight, singing a wordless song as he danced. When questioned as to why he was dancing alone, he answered, "I am not dancing alone, I am dancing with the forest, dancing with the moon."[9]

9 *Kanga mo bi ekili: mo bi na ndura, mo bi na songi.*

Schebesta (1952, 303) refers to *songi* (moon) as being one of the net-hunting names for God, regarded as the creator of all things (1952, 305), particularly of man, which *songi* creates by means of menstrual blood. He does not, unfortunately, give more information or documentation on this interpretation, but there is no doubt that the moon is, to the Mbuti, an object of interest and (as seen above) affection, and at the same time in common discussion they do connect the moon with menstruation, and menstruation with fertility. I have myself not come across any instance of the moon being worshipped as such, unless this moonlight dance be regarded as worship, except in one song of the *molimo*, the words of which were:

Ema songi, ema, ema; okisu ema; pika'i.
Mother moon, mother, mother, hear us mother; come.

This is remarkably similar to a translation given by Bowra (1962, 70) of a song of the Gabon pygmies cited by Trilles (1945, 157).

Moon, O mother moon, O mother moon,
mother of living things,
Hear our voice, O mother moon!
O, mother moon, O mother moon,
Keep away the spirits of the dead,
Hear our voice, O mother moon,
O mother moon, O mother moon.

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1982 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1

him. He is then accused and has to make suitable offerings which are necessary not only to help in the protection of the girl and her family, but also for his own protection, since he has been linked with her verbally, however untruthfully. He may then deny the charge, and if the girl's parents think he would make a suitable husband, there may be some litigation. Or they may consider him unsuitable, and let the matter drop. If he likes the girl and accepts the responsibility, this constitutes the first step toward official betrothal. If he disclaims all responsibility, then the girl has to try again; until she has a husband the danger is thought to remain.

The period of seclusion varies from tribe to tribe, and even from village to village. Sometimes it is just for a week or two; sometimes it lasts a month or more. And sometimes it lasts until the girl is betrothed and can be led from her room of shame to be taken away by her husband. At the final wedding ritual she is ceremonially cut off from her family, and told that she is now her husband's responsibility and must fend for herself and not come running home every time she gets beaten. The point, of course, is that if she does this her husband can claim back the wealth he will have already paid over in the expectancy of her fidelity and success as a wife and bearer of children. And by the time the disaster occurs her family will almost certainly have spent the money to obtain a bride for one of her brothers.

The whole affair is a rather shameful one in the eyes of the villagers, as well as a dangerous one. It is something best concealed and not talked about in public. The girl is an object of suspicion, scorn, repulsion, and anger. It is not a happy coming of age.

For the Pygmies, the people of the forest, it is a very different thing. To them blood, in the usual context in which they see it, is equally dreadful. But they recognize it as being the symbol not only of death, but also of life. And menstrual blood to them means life. Even between a husband and wife it is not a frightening thing,

3t Turnbull E-5 (1951-1956) 1962 PO4 Pygmies PO4
Mbuti

though there are certain restrictions connected with it. In fact, the Pygmies consider that any couple that really wants to have children should "sleep with the moon."

So when a young Pygmy girl begins to flower into maturity, and blood comes to her for the first time, it comes to her as a gift, received with gratitude and rejoicing—rejoicing that the girl is now a potential mother, that she can now proudly and rightfully take a husband. There is no mention of fear or superstition, and everyone is told the good news.

The girl enters seclusion, but not the seclusion of the village girl. She takes with her all her young friends, those who have not yet reached maturity, and some older ones.

In the house of the elima the girls celebrate the happy event together. Together they are taught the arts and crafts of motherhood by an old and respected relative. They learn not only how to live like adults, but how to sing the songs of adult women. Day after day, night after night, the elima house resounds with the throaty contralto of the older women and the high, piping voices of the youngest. It is a time of gladness and happiness, not for the women alone but for the whole people. Pygmies from all around come to pay their respects, the young men standing or sitting about outside the elima house in the hopes of a glimpse of the young beauties inside. And there are special elima songs which they sing to one another, the girls singing a light, cascading melody in intricate harmony, the men replying with a rich, vital chorus. For the Pygmies the elima is one of the happiest, most joyful occasions in their lives.

And so it was with happiness that we all heard that not one but two girls in our camp had been blessed by the moon.

At first it was just Akidinimba, daughter of Manyalibo's sister. Akidinimba was a notorious flirt who considered herself the most beautiful girl in the world. She was just sufficiently plump to be envied by less well-endowed girls, but not so plump that her maidenly